DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 726 CE 040 559

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TITLE The Southern Literacy Campaign 1910-1935: Lessons for Adult Learning in an Information Society.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 42p.; Paper presented at the National Adult Education Conference (Louisville, KY, November 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Case Studies; Delivery Systems; *Educational History; Educational Needs; *Educational Practices; Financial Support; Functional Literacy; Illiteracy; *Literacy Education; Needs Assessment; *Outcomes of Education; Participation; Program Content; Program Effectiveness; Rural Areas; Rural Education; Socioeconomic Influences; Student Characteristics; Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS *United States (South)

ABSTRACT

From 1910 to 1935 a campaign was waged in the southern United States to eradicate adult illiteracy. This program was primarily based on volunteers, and it revolved around night, summer, or cotton mill schools that were often termed Opportunity Schools. Many parallels can be drawn to current efforts to address the problem of functional illiteracy among adults living in rural areas. These parallels can be readily illustrated by a comparison of the Alabama literacy campaign, which lasted from approximately 1915 to 1935, and current efforts to reduce functional illiteracy in rural Clay and Jackson counties in Tennessee. Like its counterpart in the early 20th century, the Tennessee campaign is one in which the scope of the problem far exceeds the resources committed to the problem. A second element of commonality between the two campaigns rests in the realm of the commitment and almost evangelical zeal of those providing financial support for and volunteering to tutor in the programs. It would seem, however, that as long as the reduction of adult illiteracy remains a peripheral enterprise rather than a central mission of the educational system, efforts to eliminate adult illiteracy will remain in the last two decades of the 20th century what they became in the first two decades--a lofty goal beyond the grasp of those who sought to reach it. (MN)

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THE SOUTHERN LITERACY CAMPAIGN 1910-1935:

LESSONS FOR ADULT LEARNING IN AN INFORMATION SOCIETY

(Paper Presented at the
National Adult Education Conference
Louisville, Kentucky
November, 1984)

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Introduction

Adult education in the "information age" evokes images of new found resources and delivery systems capable of bringing the adult learner into the mainstream of competencies needed to compete within the structure of late twentieth century culture. An analysis of adult education movements in the early twentieth century might provide sobering evidence of the basic constraints within which all adult education programs find themselves forced to operate. The southern literacy movement offers a case-in-point. From 1910-1935 adult education programs attempted to remove the "black stain" of illiteracy through special schooling designed to meet the peculiar needs of southern adults. Within the confines of cotton miils, urban settings, and particularly the rural agrarian South, the southern literacy campaign labored with a maximum amount of devotion and a minimum amount of resources necessary to accomplish the objective of erradicating adult illiteracy. This discussion sets forth the basic assumptions, methods of delivering educational services, and the parameters of constraiant within which the southern literacy campaign operated. The assumptions and the constraints of the southeren illiteracy campaign prove more relevant and timely to achieving an understanding of the contemporary status of adult education than what one might want to believe. Stripped of modern terminology and technology, the contempoprary adulteducation administrator and practitioner might find significant lessons

for the late twentieth century. Particular scrutiny will be given to the Alabama literacy campaign and the efforts of Clay County, Alabama for illustrative, case-study purposes. Contemporary literacy programs in Tennessee will be utilized for comparative purposes.

Southern Illiteracy:The Early Twentieth Century

Concern for the functionally illiterate adult and the perceived needs of the out-of-school adult motivates educators to ameliorate the conditions which apparently blight contemporary life. The early twentieth century, however, exhibited substantial, if not staggering, adult illiteracy rates far more debillitating than the deficiences perceived in the out-of-school adult population in the late twentieth century. For persons ten years-of-age or older, the total southern illiteracy rate stood at 19.2% split between a 9.6% white illiteracy and a 32.1% black illiteracy rate.(Bureau of the Census, 1913)[1]

Insert Table 1 About Here

Average county illiteracy rates varied from a total illiteracy of 10.4% for Kentucky to 34.3% for Louisiana. Regardless of race, age proved to be an important variable in the distribtion of illiteracy. A simple rule of thumb points to the obvious: As the age of the individual increased so did the likelihood of illiteracy. Blacks fifty-five years- of- age and older

entered life during slavery and passed their educational prime when no educational services existed. The declining illiteracy rates for descending age groups suggests that educational services gradually increased after the Civil War. Given the existing illiteracy rates for even the youngest age group, however, the southern United States appeared to be an efficient illiteracy mill capable of sustaining a high output. Adults throughout the South stood in need of special educational services if they were to obtain the benefits of literacy. Not surprisingly, adult illiteracy became one focal point of concern for educators wishing to bring the South up to standards equivalent with the remainder of the United States. Spurred by the 1910 census, southern states such as Kentucky, Alabama, and South Carolina undertook ambitious campaigns to reduce illiteracy.

The Southern Literacy Campaign

The erradication of southern illilteracy took the form of special schools designed to teach adults basic skills of reading and writing. Adult schools took the form of night schools during the regular school year, cotton mill schools, or intensive schools held during the summer lay-by season of late July andAugust. Called Opportunity Schools, Lay-By, Moonlight, or Old-Folks schools, the intensive schooling provided adults with an opportunity to develop basic literacy skills, receive enrichment in health, agriculture,history and geography,home economics as well as socialize with their peers.

Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart, Superintendent of the Rowan

County, Kentucky school system initiated the first adult illiteracy schools. Rowan County had "more than one thousand adult illiterates..."(Fosdick,1972,p.74). Teachers adopted the slogan "No illiterates in Rowan County" and agreed to teach a night schools" for the benefit of all persons 'between 18 and 100 years of age.'" Rowan County's" Moonlight Schools" caught the attention of many educators. Wycliffe Rose, Executive Secretary of the Southern Education Board , observed:

> "almost everybody in the county seems to be going to school. In age they range from 18 to 86; whole families are going to school-the younger children during the day, the parents and older children at night. Not only men and women of mature years, but the aged have shown a yearning for this opportunity to learn; many of these people are past sixty, a number are between seventy and eighty...(Rose, Note 1)

Not only were many adults going to school, they were also making remarkable progress. Within a few months of the launching or Rowan County's campaign one account stated:

> They have largely decreased illiteracy in the county and have demonstrated that illiteracy among the adult population may be rapidly diminished; a number of men and women, after but two weeks' of instruction, wrote the county superintendent a letter, the first production of that nature in their lives...these could not read or write a word before they entered the night schools.(Rose, Note 1)

More importantly, the fire was spreading to another county.

Rose concluded with an optimistic note:

> And as one thinks of all the inflammable material throughout this Appalachian region and down to the valleys to the sea, one asks, "Where will it stop?' The public school is on the job in the mountains of Kentucky. (Rose, Note 1)

By 1913 Rose's prophetic note seemed on the verge of becoming a reality. Twenty-five Kentucky school systems established moonlight schools and in 1914 the Kentucky legislature created the Kentucky Illiteracy Commission but provided no funding until 1916. Other states also took up the illitearcy cause. Two states, Alabama and South Carolina, conducted particularly vigorous illiteracy campaigns which merit closer scrutiny.

Alabama:Illiteracy and the Illiteracy Campaign

Ten years into the twentieth century Alabama illitercy mirrored that of the South with 22.9% of the total population,9.9% of the white population, and 40.1% of the black population classified as illiterate. The Alabama age structure also reflected the same increase of illiteracy by age-grade as did the South as a whole. Illiteracy, however, did not spread itself evenly throughout Alabama. Black illiteracy rates tended to increase and white rates to decrease as the percentage of blacks within a county increased. Conversely, white illiteracy rates tended to increase and black rates to decrease as the percentage of whites within a county increased. Thus, predominantly black (86.0%) Lowndes County possessed a 3.7%

white illiteracy rate and a 51.1% black illiteracy rate. Predominantly white (90.5%) Jackson County possessed a 17.0% white illiteracy rate and a 35.2% black illiteracy rate.

Integral to age and race stood the variable of socio-economic status. Given the overwhelmingly (88.6%) rural Alabama population it would be reasonable to assume that farm tenancy, and its corresponding socio-economic attributes,provides an appropriate variable. With some 56.1% of the average Alabama county farm operators holding tenant status a large group existed in a more precarious state of existence than did their fellow operators who owned the land on which they worked. Split between 30.0% white tenants and 25.9% black tenants, the internal distribution of farm tenants followed the pattern of illiteracy. Counties with a higher white illitercy rate tended to have higher white farm tenancy rates. Counties with higher black illiteracy rates tended to have higher black farm tenancy rates. Translated into statistical correlations the relationship between white illiteracy and white tenancy rates ($r=.80, r^2=.64$),black illiteracy and black farm tenancy ($r=.41, r^2=.41$), and total farm tenancy to total illiteracy ($r=.55, r^2=.30$) substantiate the occurence of rather systematic relationship (Bureau of the Census,1913).[2] The densely black populace in the Black Belt not only had a lower caste status against which to contend, but the disabilities accompany the more intensely exploitive conditions of farm tenancy. While it certainly "paid" to be white in such a system, it also "paid"--both black and white--to be free of the farm tenancy

status.

Against such a backdrop of substantial illiteracy the emergence of the Alabama illiteracy campaign makes sense. Beginning in 1915 the Alabama Illiteracy Commission began efforts designed to reduce adult illiteracy within the state. Established by Governor Charles Henderson on 9 February 1915, the Commission received wide latitude to "Expend any funds" it might receive. However, no funds "of any kind" were to come "out of the State treasury." Governor Henderson proclaimed 6 May 1915 as Illiteracy calling upon "every literate man, woman, and youth" to consecrate himself to the service of the state and, aided by "the favorable guidance of Almighty God," helped "wipe away the black stain" of illiteracy;thereby promoting Alabama's "industrial...efficiency."(Alabama Illiteracy Commission, 1915,p.1). References to "industrial efficiency" suggest that the Alabama illiteracy campaign, like any educational activity, contained assumptions about the purposes to which education aimed and articulated the assumptions in the form of an ideology and rationale. Despite the "call to arms" which called upon "every literate man, woman, and child of every station, community, or creed to consecrate himself to this stupendous, though surmountable work" along with the assistance of "Almighty God," the ultimate aims related to the perceived need to catapult Alabama into the mainstream of technologically, industrially,commercially, agriculturally efficient America. Not surprisingly, statements by the Alabama State Department of Education (which absorbed the work of the

Illiteracy Commission) claimed that:

> If in addition to learning to read and write, and perform operations in arithmetic, a person gains the power to read a newspaper, a farm journal, and the Bible, and has developed in him health and civic consciousness, he is well on the way toward a normal life. (Alabama State Department of Education,1919,p.111).

Apparently, living a "normal life" fell outside the domain of illiterates despite the normal condition which illiteracy apparently typified for a large percent of southerners over the years. Competing within the context of twentieth century America, however, made it necessary for illiteracy to be considered a debit, a blight, which must be eliminated.

Launching the Alabama Literacy Campaign resulted in the creation of Opportunity Schools designed to provide adults with an opportunity to develop basic reading and writing skills. In order to bring about such schools the Alabama Illiteracy Commission initially relied on a variety of fund raising activities. Civic Organizations such as the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs (AFWC),interested lay- persons, and sympathetic teachers engaged in button selling campaigns. The button proclaimed "362,779 Illiteracy in Alabama:Let's Remove It."Sellers of buttons received cards containing "printed appeals in verse." On one side the verse paid tribute to the button seller.

THE BUTTON SELLER

"Where are you going my pretty maid?"

"A button-selling,sir," she said.

"What kinds of buttons, my pretty maid?"

"Illiteracy buttons, of course," she said.

"Why do you sell them, my pretty maid?"

"For love of my native State,"she said.

"To whom do you sell them, my pretty maid?"

"One to you, I hope," she said.

"How much shall I pay you, my pretty maid?"

"As much as you possibly can,"she said.

on the reverse side, the verse appealed to the patriotism of the potential donor.

THE PRICE

How much do yo love your native State?
How much do you wish to make it great?
How much do you feel the weight of shame
That illiteracy should mar its fame?
How much--count it up--to the State do you owe
For your own schooling some time ago?
How much do you value your power to read?
How much of the "Golden Rule" is your creed?
Alas! You are not a millionaire,
But pay what you can-its only fair
(Feagin,1915,pp.22-23).

In addition, the AFWC supplied a marching song "Alabama Aids Her Own" sung to the tune of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Such doggeral helped build enthusiasm and raise funds for the Illiteracy Commission to print informational literature as well as guidelines for teachers. The early button campaigns proved disappointing, however netting only $32.10 in Union Spring City campaign and $75.00 in the Autauga County campaign. Even with the 1916 campaigns in Montgomery, Mobile, and Birminghams raising a respective $1,429.55, $1,143.81, and $2,414.26 funds remained scarce. The limited funds helped the Illiteracy Commission employ a field agent to assist county school systems to survey local needs, set up volunteer teacher Opportunity Schools, and recruit potential students. In addition, some communities augmented their scarce funds by having teachers "living around among them" during the school session (Feagin,p.31). As a result, some two-thirds of Alabama counties reported some Opportunity School effort during during the 1915-16 initial year of effort. While white adults received the first benefit of instruction, the involvement of blacks soon followed.

Founded on volunteer labor and run on a shoe-string, the Alabama illitracy campaign required state funding and bureaucratization if it were to mount a systematic effort. Beginning in 1919 the Alabama legislature funded $7,500 annually to the State Department of Education for illiteracy work (State of Alabama, 1919,p.805). Ceasing to formally exist, Illiteracy Commission work fell under the domain of the

Division of Exceptional Education. The division's charge lead it to stimulate the continued operation of Opportunity Schools within county and city school systems. The 1920 Annual Report of the Alabama State Department of Education indicated that seventeen counties operated well-defined programs under the supervision of an organizer with another fourteen counties having at least one or more Opportunity Schools taught. Some 2,940 adults split between 992 whites and 1,948 blacks received Opportunity School instruction.

The pattern of Opportunity School funding and the resulting county/city participation patterns evident after the introduction of state funding changed little throughout the Alabama illiteracy campaign. Table 2 points to the instability of Opportunity School participation rates. Consistency of effort marked but a very few counties or cities Significant variations occured as to individual counties' participation. Coosa County operated Opportunity Schools in

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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school years 1918-19,1922-28, and 1933-34. Bullock County participated in 1919-24, 1928-31, and 1933-34. St. Clair County participated in 1916-18, 1919-20,1923-25, and 1928-30(3). No county operated Oppor- tunity Schools in every year of the 1915-35 time period. An increase in the annual appropriation to $12,500 in 1921, a temporary appropria- tion of $50,000 in

1927, and a Rosenwald Fund grant of $22,500 in 1930 could not begin to provide resources necessary to achieve 100% participation. The onslaught of the depression and funding cutbacks to $3,600 annually ensured a modest effort in the early 1930s.

Clay County,Alabama:A Case Study

Clay County,Alabama provides more detailed insight into the function of the Alabama illiteracy campaign and the manner in which the Opportunity Schools functioned. Located in central Alabama,Clay County operated Opportunity schools from 1925-34. The major thrust, however, declined after the 1930-31 school year such that in 1934-35 only two white Opportunity Schools operated. Black Opportunity Schools ceased to exist after the 1927 summer lay-by season. In 1926-27,countyfunds of some $1,200 constituted the Clay County contribution with the remainder derived from funding provided by the State Department of Education Division of Exceptional Education. Table 3 indicates the effort to distribute Opportunity Schools throughout Clay County such that a cross section of the adult black and white population could reach the Opportunity Schools. From the combined county and state

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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funds the teachers, county organizer, and other expenses found their support. A county organizer traveled throughout Clay County to develop interest in the Opportunity Schools.

According to one informant the organizer made Clay countians feel quite special. The organizer indicated that Clay County represented a special selection by the state to participate in an experimental program: Only four counties in the state had been selected to participate in an experimental program (Kennedy,Note 2). Such promotional appeal ignored ignored the fact that a majority of Alabama's sixty-seven counties had already participated in the Opportunity Schools to some extent.

The structure of the Opportunity School may be clearly seen in the memories of informants who attend the Mountain Opportunity School during the lay-by season of 1927. Located in southern Clay County and named after Uncle Joe Mountain, the Opportunity School serviced a rural, white population. During the 1927 lay-by season some 101 adults attend the Mountain Opportunity School. Significantly, many of the 101 adults did not prove to be illiterates. Many literate adults attended as the Opportunity School provided the only diversion readily available and affordable in the rural area. Willie and Lizzie Alford attended despite their well developed literacy skills. Willie Alford subscribed to the Atlanta Constitution and read it in its entirity over a period of years prior to attending the Opportunity School. Grady and Edna Alford, Willie and Lizzie Alford's son and daughter-in-law, also attended in order "to mess around with their friends. J. B. Fuller attended in part because he wished to brush up on arithmetical skills to better estimate the board feet contained in timber logs.(Alford, Alford, Fuller, Note 3).

During the six weeks, five days a week,four hours per day Opportunity School session the curriculum addressed itself to literacy and a considerable amount beyond literacy. Two teachers, M. G. Satterfield and J.W. Teal, taught the Mountain Opportunity School adults. Instruction consisted of basic drill to learn the alphabet and sound-letter relationships, writing simple words and sentences, and reading simple materials. Since the 101 adults included many literates, instruction also included basic arithmetic skills keyed to problems related to farming and lumbering. Teachers Satterfield and Teal divided the adults into groups such that basic reading and writing skills could be taught to those true illiterates, while the others received further training in mathematics and reading.Even history and geography made its way into the Mountain Opportunity School curriculum. Grady Alford clearly remembered learning about the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in central Alabama where "Andrew Jackson whupped the Indians." Vera Thompson, a state of Alabama home economics agent lived-in with a local resident, Annie Maude Kennedy,during the six weeks such that the women in attendance could witness cooking demonstrations and learn better nutrition (Kennedy, Note 4). Edna Alford found such nutritional education useful as her father John Sprayberry suffered from pellegra due to an unbalanced diet devoid offruits and vegetables. At the end of the six week session, a full day of games and a picnic brought the entire session to a lively climax. A tug-of-war, a sack race, an egg race a spelling bee, and climbing a pole provided the adults

with an opportunity to remember the Opportuhity School in a fond light.

Formal Curriculum Guidelines

Descriptions of the Mountain Opportunity School by informants mesh with the formal guidelines for teachers of Opportunity Schools published by the Alabama State Department of Education. While the actual, point-by-point delivery and coverage varied from the official Opportunity School guidelines, the formal documents reflect the basic thrust sought in the Alabama illiteracy campaign. What Grady and Edna Alford, J.B. Fuller, Willie and Lizzie Alford, and the remaining adults experienced readily fits the thrust of the bureaucratic guidelines mandated to teachers Satterfield and Teal from the State Department of Education in Montgomery.

The Suggestions for Teachers of Opportunity Schools for Adults published by the State Department of Education in various editions for blacks and whites presented a logical organization and content for instruction of adults. Lesson materials for reading, arithmetic, spelling helps and word lists, language, geography and government of Alabama, health, writing, farming and homemaking all made their way into the teacher guidelines. Legitimacy established itself in the introductory passages with official State Board of Education comments, a rationale for Opportunity Schools, administration guidelines, a listing of content areas, and comments on "methods of teaching reading." The administration section included sub-sections on location, length of term, time of operation, who may attend, teachers, reports, requisition for

state aid, and course of study (Alabama State Department of Education, 1930 pp 1-2).

Given the "raison detre" of literacy for the Opportunity Schools the section on reading instruction merits initial inspection. The basal readers, the primary instructional textbooks included the first, second, and third books of the Country Life Readers and the Bible Story Reader. Additional reading came in the form of newspapers, Sunday School literature, the Alabama Forest News, bulletins by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and a variety of public signs. The public signs included a practical emphasis upon highway signs such as Danger, Dangerous Curve, Detour, Railroad Crossing, Go Slow, State Highway Department, and Stop-Look-Listen.

An extensive arithmatic section even began with a statement of aims not unlike that common to contemporary educational documents.

> Aim: To teach four fundamental processes with whole numbers and fractions.
>
> To enable him to see the application of these processes to the problems in his everyday life.
>
> To enable him to formulate his own problems and solve them with accuracy and intelligence (Alabama State Department of Education, 1930,pp.5-6).

Thus, lesson one could stress counting from 1 to 100 as well as practice with telephone, mail box, highway, and calendar numbers. Lessons dealing with addition, subtraction,

multiplication, and division included practical problem solving counterparts to the basic drill with practice exercises. As a result, a subraction lesson might include "A woman got a $10 bill for chopping cotton. She bought a dress for $8. How much change should she receive?" Similar practical emphases occured in language lessons which stress the writing of telegrams, friendly letters, and business letters. Sections on "Geography and Government," "Health," and "Recreation, Farming, and Homemaking" all contained equally practical content.Surprisingly, the edition for teachers of blacks contained a high degree of similarity in content.

Observations:The Alabama Illiteracy Campaign

Several observations germane to the Alabama illiteracy campaign readily emerge from the available evidence. First, the resources made available for the elimination of illiteracy never matched the magnitude of the task at hand. The 1920 Annual Report of the State Department of Education indicated that Opportunity School effort expended a total of $5,784.10--including funds from all state and private sources--to reach 992 white and 1,948 black adult students.(State of Alabama, 1920,pp.24-27). Given the 362,779 Alabama illiterates, the Opportunity School target population fared poorly. The temporary increase to a $50,000 annual appropriation and the one-time $22,500 Rosenwald Fund donation hardly constituted the funding required to make a significantly larger impact. Even at the "high-water" mark in 1930-31 with some 775 schools and 29,853 students involved, the effort fell far short of reaching

the 251,095 listed in the 1930 census as still being illiterate (State of Alabama, 1931,pp.382-83).Regardless of the county involved, the limited funding in no way allowed the Opportunity Schools to reach more than a fraction of the targeted population which the 1915 "call to arms" sought to eliminate.

A second observation readily emerges from the first. Throughout the Alabama illiteracy campaign the Opportunity Schools broadened their focus beyond the primary objective of reducing illiteracy. Given the "call to arms," the "army" seeking to destroy the illiterate "enemy" violated basic strategic and tactical military doctrine. An awareness of Clausewitz would suggest a need to identify an objective, do not attempt to obtain too many objectives, and commit sufficient resources to achieving the carefully defined objectives. The German campaign in Russia in 1941-42 offers numerous examples--the battles of enriclement, the drive on Moscow and Stalingrad--of a competent force attempting to achieve too many objectives without devoting sufficient resources to the objective. Given the primary objective, a massive objective in its own right, the limited financial and human energies of the Alabama illiteracy campaign should have focused upon the elimination of illiteracy. Secondary objectives such as health, cleanliness, nutrition, history, geography, and arithmetic merely drained the limited resources from focusing upon the primary objective. The Mountain Opportunity School in Clay County provides a simple case-in-point.Of the 101 adults

who attented in Summer, 1927 a large majority of the students possessed literacy skills. Brushing-up or increasing their reading and writing skills clearly benefitted the likes of Grady Alford. Likewise, Edna Alford learned receipes which she uses nearly a half-century later. J. B. Fuller did benefit from learning arithmetic skills needed in estimating the board feet content of logs. Unlike illiterates Will Parish, John Waldrip, and George James who learned the basic literacy skills for which the illiteracy campaign obstensibly existed, the majority of financing for the Mountain Opportunity School failed to address the primary objective of creating literacy amongst illiteracy. Evidence of the dillution of the Alabama literacy campaign objectives emerges throughout the Annual Reports of the State Department of Education. The 1924 AnnualReport claimed a total of 7,504 adults---4,544 blacks and 2,960 whites--enrolled in Opportunity Schools but only 1,444 fit the "Taught to read and write" category. Similarly, the 29,853 who attended Opportunity Schools during the 1930-31 school year actually included 6,335 illiterates--4,579 blacks and 1,756 whites--or a mere 21.2% of the Opportunity Schocl population.[27] In sum, the scarce resources of the Alabama literacy campaign failed to reach the primary target audience.

A third observation evolves from the adult constituency which made up the target audience of the illiteracy campaign. Being adults the target audience fell outside the primary domain of the State Department of Education as well as the county and city school systems.Given their adult status beyond

the beck-and-call of the elementary and secondary school systems it proved necessary to reach adults through publicity generated through the organizers employed by the county and city school systems. Such organizers travelled about the county contacting adults to build interest in attending Opportunity Schools as well as helping school officials determine where Opportunity Schools should be offered. Adult learners, however, already lived lives of their own independent of the perceived needs of the educational system and could not be forced to attend. Nor could the limited publicizing efforts generated by the county organizer ensure that every adult knew of the Opportunity School and its advantages to them. Large numbers of the target audience easily slipped through the limited informational network which sought to inform them of the program designed to eliminate their "malady."Indeed, the literate audience which made up a considerable portion of the Opportunity School clientele possessed the rudimentary educational threshold to respond confidently to the news of the impending Opportunity Schools. One Autauga County, Alabama Opportunity School teacher reported that "One man who entered five days before school closed, said one night,"I ain't sorry but for one thing, I'm sorry I ain't been coming all the time, but I was just 'shamed to come"(Feagin,p.41). Realistically, a substantial number of illiterates probably avoided attendance despite their feelings of need. The formal setting of Opportunity Schools, no matter the benigness of intent, still posed a threat to those aware of their own ignorance.

A fourth observation rests in the effort of the Alabama literacy campaign to elicit support from outside the mainstream educational community. The $22,500 contribution by the Rosenwald fund represented 45% of the Alabama state funding for 1930-31. Similarly, the South Carolina literacy campaign utilized Rosenwald funds to temporarily strengthen its Opportunity School program. Such funds represented the growing wealth of corporations to engage in "good works." Correspondence between South Carolina literacy leader Wil Lou Gray and Rosenwald fund administrators, reflect the corporate connections to Sears-Roebuck. Likewise, prestigious organizations such as the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs provided a great deal of support to the Opportunity School movement. In South Carolina, clubwomen also found illiteracy to be a favorite project to support. Such support proved immensely helpful to the scope of the literacy campaign in Alabama and throughout the South. Being significant in nature, however, meant that state funding and the mainstream educational priorities never really focused intently upon the literacy campaign. Gambits by Wil Lou Gray of South Carolina threatening her resignation as Director of Adult Education provides extreme evidence of the lengths to which adult educators might go to win a meager increase in the commitment to fighting illiteracy. In Clay County and Chambers County, Alabama the references to the Opportunity Schools represent but a small, passing fraction, of the business considered by the Board of Education. No matter the urgency of the illiteracy

problem, and the lip-service paid to its significance, the import of contributions made by interested third parties exceeded the resources available within the scope of mainstream elementary and secondary education.

Finally, the literacy campaign "rode upon the backs" of the existing school infrastructure. As the "poor relation" grafted upon the school systems, the illiteracy campaign made use of the school facilities, teachers, and administrative personnel of the county and city schools. Teachers such as Satterfield and Teal in Clay County, Marie Coles in Chambers County, and Jessie Lee Windham in Covington County, Alabama taught Opportunity School adults as a secondary function to their primary school year roles as classroom teachers. Superintendents, school boards, and supervisory personnel also made administrative decision and carried out communication with the State Department of Education in order for the Opportunity Schools to exist. Such tasks, however, came in addition to, incidental to, the major functions assigned them. Opportunity Schools would fail to exist without the cooperation of such agencies and personnel. The same agencies and roles would have existed without the Opportunity Schools. Within State Departments of Education, very few positions depended upon the existence of the literacy campaign. In Alabama, the division of Exceptional Education included other mandates besides the literacy campaign. In South Carolina, Wil Lou Gray's position as Director of Adult Education evolved from the desire to attract her participation in the literacy campaign.

Nevertheless, Adult Education involved programs beyond the extensive activities of the literacy work.

Realities, then, painted a much less rosy view of the southern literacy campaign than did the rhethoric which called people to arms to march against the "stain" amongst the midst of southerners. Limited resources, a massive task, proliferating objectives, and a secondary status within the existing bureaucracies which delivered its services all worked to limit the success of the southern illiteracy campaign. The decline of southern illiteracy during 1910-35 represented other factors such as increased schooling and attrition of illiterates through death. The primary objective of the Opportunity Schools, the removal of illiteracy, took place virtually without an impact by the Opportunity Schools themselves. Numerous successes occured on the individual level. For a limited few, both black and white, the ability to read a Bible, a newspaper, a road sign or to write one's name marked major triumphs from the condition of illiteracy. The fortunate few, however, proved to be the minority.

Implications for Contemporary Adult Education

Constraints placed upon the southern literacy campaign appear to be somewhat "timeless" in nature. Contemporary adult education geared to the adult learner "by-passed" in the existing elementary and secondary system still operates within a context analogous to that of the southern literacy campaign. Total illiteracy appears to be a relatively infrequent occurence, but "functional illiteracy" rose up to take its

place as the incumbant malady inflicted upon millions of adults. Adult basic education combined with a thrust to help adults obtain a high school equivalency diploma address basic problems of those adults lacking reading and writing skills necessary to function in the contemporary market place. Prior to entering the "information society" and competing for any "high tech" jobs or their ancillary spin-offs basic literacy must be achieved. The 1930 census provided the last systemtic gathering of county illiteracy data as the illiteracy rate declined to a point where it apparently did not exist with sufficient magnitude to itemize. Educators, however, found that "functional illitercy" existed in its place. Even with mandatory school attendance it became possible for a student to escape the educational system with a reading level equivalent to that of a second or third grade student. While some reading can be done, there exist large gaps in word attack and comprehension skills which make it difficult or impossible to function with a majority of the complex written messages encountered by adults.

Eliminating the malady of functional illiteracy brings about a similar set of actions by educators in the 1980s as did the task of eliminating illiteracy in the early 1900s. At the same time, the constraints operating on adult educators provide a clear case of de jevu. The problems faced by the adult literacy program in Nashville, Tennessee seem redundant. Accordingly, a headline in the Nashville, Tennessean for 28 March 1984 proclaimed "Adult Literacy Program Faces Serious

Problems. The largest adult literacy program in Tennessee desperately needed donations due to a projected shortfall of funds. Subsequently, an 11 June 1984 Tennessean article heralded "HCA,Nissan Giving $2,500 Each To Help Teach Reading Adults."

> ...Hospital Corporation of America and Nissan have agreed to donate a total of $5,000 to the program so that its services may become availble to more of the 30,000 Nashvillians considered functionally illiterate, said Sharon Wood, coordinator of Metro's Adult Reading Program. The program is operated through the local school system.
>
> "There are between 200,000 and 300,000 functionally illiterate people across the state," said Luke Easter, director of the statewide Volunteer Literacy Program.
>
> During the four years of the Nashville Literacy Council's operation, the number of students participating has increased from 20 in 1980-81 to more than 120 last year, Easter said.
>
> The Nashville council is the fund raising-arm of the local Adult Reading Program, which began receiving state money for reading materials and the coordinator's salary seven months ago, Easter said.
>
> ...As part of a nationwide literacy push, Louis Cherry Ice Cream has developed a Famous Amos

chocolate chip cookie ice cream which will be sold through grocery stores, said Bob Kelley,sales manager for Meadow Gold Ice Cream which will distribute the product locally.

Louis Cherry has agreed to donate 1% of all sales of the ice cream to the national Literacy Volunteers of America (Tennessean, Vo.82,No.212,p.1-b). Thus, the program of adult literacy based upon one-to-one teaching would receive a much needed boost from several sources.

Analysis of the problems faced by the Volunteer Literacy Program point to the same set of problems faced by the southern literacy movement. First, the scope of the problem far exceeds the the resources committed to the problem. The Nashville budget of $8,000, the labor of volunteer teachers, and the corporate giving combine to reach a fraction of the target audience of functional illiterates. If 120 adults eliminated their functional illiteracy in 1983-84 (a 100% success rate), then .4% of the problem ceased to exist. Assuming no new functional illiterates would enter the problem pool, it would appear that attrition of functional illiteracy by death offers the only possible manner to remove the functional illiterates from Nashville's midst. The current pool of 30,000 adults would need to live for 250 years to become literate under the existing Nashville program.

On a statewide basis the Nashville Volunteer Literacy Program received $290,000 annually from the Tennessee legislature for each of the last three years. Distributed

throughout Tennessee school systems, the $290,000 works as "seed money" to help school systems and the local literacy councils establish local programs, recruit volunteers, and seek private sector support. Clay and Jackson counties in the Upper Cumberland region of middle Tennesee utilize Job Training Partnership Act (formerly CETA) funding to pay a coordinator to assist the program (Easter,Note 5). Given the most optimistic assessments, Tennessee effort falls short of the scope needed to address the problem. Adult Basic Education teachers in Tennessee receive $10.00 per hour to teach those adults who possess functional literacy. Given 40,000 volunteer hours equated at $400,000 the total figure comes to $690,000 per year. With 300,000 functional illiterates, $2.30 per functional illiterate appears available for reaching the problem. Even with JTPA funding and corporate giving (figures which are not available on a statewide basis) it seems unlikely that $5.00 per capita could be available. Given the "inefficiency" of one-to-one instructional effort as opposed to delilvery of instructional services in a class setting, the task further reduces the impact of actual and equated resources.

A second element of commonality between the southern literacy campaign and contemporary efforts rests in the realm of commitment, evangelistic zeal, and "good works." Governor Charles Henderson of Alabama launched the Alabama illiteracy campaign with references to "Almighty God" and"consecration." Cora Wilson Stewart of Kentucky and Wil Lou Gray of South

Carolina spoke and worked in terms of evangelistic zeal. Civic organizations and churches made substantialcontributions as did philanthropic efforts linked to corporations. In the late twentieth century, the Nashville Literacy Program depends upon volunteers to teach the adults, additional corporations such as AVCO, Peterbilt, B. Dalton, and Genesco make contributions, and churches such as West End United Methodist Church also contribute (Woods,Note 6). Billboards featuring country music stars Johnny Cash and Roy Clark urge literates to volunteer as adult reading teachers. Couched in contemporary language, the description of "beautiful, dedicated people" which help make working with such a program "very gratifying" reflect an evangelistic commitment similar to the early twentieth century (Woods,Note 6). Belief, commitment, evangelistic zeal prove necessary to take on an immense task with inadequate resources.

A third observation points to the development of guidelines and curriculum materials not unlike that of the early twentieth century. The Nashville Adult Reading Program utilizes a "Coping Skills Inventory" which includes items designed to test time-telling,reading of help wanted advertisements, bottle labels, grocery recipts as well as road signs. Instead of the Country Life Readers the contemporary programs substitute their own adult oriented readers such as the Steck-Vaughn Adult Reading Series and the Laubauch Way to Reading. Volunteer tutors also receive training designed to help them understand the causes of illiteracy, characteristics

of adult students, characteristics of successful tutors, and methods of instruction based upon language experience, sight words, word patterns,and phonics (Metro Adult Reading Program,n.d.). Late or early in the twentieth century emphasis focuses upon a set of teaching materials and guidelines designed to provide experienced teacher or volunteer with a rudimentary outline keyed to the perceived needs of adults at a level of complexity suited to their skill levels. Stop signs in the 1920s and stop signs in the 1980s suggest a timeless quality to the illiteracy problem and the perceived needs of adults.

A fourth observation suggests the socio-economic overtones of efforts designed to reach adult illiterates. Like the southern illiteracy campaign, contemporary efforts carry with them the desire for those more fortunate to engage in "good works." The Herald-Citizenof Cookeville, Tennessee published evidence of good works for the cause of "Promoting Literacy." Pictured with the Cookeville Mayor signing a proclomation for Adult Literacy Day stood the superintendent of schools, the director of adult education, the director of the county library, the adult literacy coordinator, and a representative of the Cookeville Junior Women's Club. Adult literacy represents one major thrust of the Cookeville Junior Women's Club as they serve the Cookeville community with a variety of service projects. Existing on the fringes of the primary mission of the Putnam County School system--like the southern literacy campaign before it--the miniscule allocation of office

space and official support hardly drain scarce resources while providing active, well educated, middle income organizations opportunities for service (Spain, Note 7). Similarly, on the national level, the Laubach programs utilize volunteers of whom 96% are high school graduates and 53% college graduates(Hunter and Harman, 1979 p.61).

Finally, the end results for those fortunate few who receive literacy training find their lives transformed. The southern literacy campaign fostered an abundance of evidence that the ability to read a road sign,sign a check, or read the newspaper greatly enhanced one's self concept. Thus, numerous letters, "testimonials," became standard in the 1920s and 1930s. Jessie Lee of Opp, Alabama saved the letters of her adult students who wrote to the superintendent thanking him for the Opportunity School experience.

Route 1

New Brockton, Ala

Aug.4, 1930

Dear Mr. Row Watson

We are in school to day and we sure do like school just fine. We are learning just fine it seems as it is helping so many of us to learn how to read and write until we wood be glad for it to continue 30 more days so we could keep learning so I guess this is all.

Yours truly as ever.

Mrs. Ida Johnson(Lee.Note 8)

Similarly, the Nashville Adult Literacy Council receives testimonial letters designed to show the abilities and gratitude of those it serves. More than fifty years separate the letters of the adult student from Opp,Alabama and the adult student from Nashville. However, the thrust remains identical.

Dear Saron:

I would like to say "Thank you"! The Adult Reading Program is definitely a turning point in my life. ...

How can I describe, how it is to go thorugh life avoiding reading? Its embarrassing and humiliating to be ask to read out loud. I attend a small country church, one Sunday and was ask to read a few verses out of the Bible. I decline. I didn't want to hurt myself any more...

...Sounding out words is a favorite pass time of mine! Its like I'm on a picnic of words, its so exciting! Yes, this 34 year old lady has a long, long way to go. I feel like a child just learning to walk. A little unsure of myself,but wanting to run...

Sincerely,

Jeannie (Woods,Note 9)

Gratitude for small favors marks the efforts to reach adult in both points of the century. Whether such gratitude in fact altered life at both points in time remains questionable. The

ability to read a bible or read more confidently does not necessarily translate into individuals ready to transform the emerging New South or become part of "the information age."

Achieving basic literacy still leaves the contemporary adult with substantial educational hurdles before the world of data processing, information storage and retrieval,word processing and "high tech" variants thereof may be accessed at even entry level. Computer technology through the world of Burger King, McDonald's, or Wendy's counter work hardly constitutes the major strides implied by the lure of the "information age."The major rewards stand substantially beyond the domain of the newly literate adult with the prospect of substantial additional investments of energy and related variables in the offing. Clearly, basic literacy represents but the initial halting steps toward the "information age" for those unfortunate enough to be bypassed in their original encounters with the educational system.

Conclusion

Adult illiteracy remains a problem in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Compared to the early 1900s the scope of the problem appears to be a minor irritant on the cultural fabric. Creating literate adults in the 1920s could not integrate them into the emerging commercial, industrial South with any degree of success. The resources allocated to the task assured the southern literacy campaign of but modest achievements, most of which came in the form of simple

pleasures and sense of dignity. Similarly, adult literacy programs in the late twentieth century exhibit the same essential characteristics. Limited resources delivered with an evangelistic zeal cannot bring a target population into the "information age" much less universally guarantee access to positions at minimum wage. The sucesses within the context of constraints do represent real achievements of worthy aduits helped by dedicated professional and lay educators with a sense of mission. Sadly, the needs of the target audience fail to match with the willingness of the resource allocators to address the problem as central to the mission of the educational system. As a peripheral enterprise, the reduction of adult illiteracy will remain in the last two decades of the twentieth century what it became in its first decades--a lofty goal beyond the grasp of those who sought to reach it.

Table 1
AGE STRUCTURE OF SOUTHERN ILLITERACY
1910

AGE	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK
10-14	12.3%	6.3%	22.0%
15-24	14.1%	7.0%	25.9%
25-34	16.1%	8.2%	31.8%
35-44	20.2%	10.4%	40.8%
45-54	27.5%	15.0%	55.5%
55-64	32.1%	18.7%	81.0%

Source: Derived from the Bureau of the Census. Thirteenth Census of the United States. Volume II. Population. Alabama-Montana. Washington,D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919. Bureau of the Census. Thirteenth Census of the United States. Volume III. Nebraska-Wyoming,Alaska, Hawaii, and Porto Rico. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913.

TABLE 2
OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL PARTICIPATION RATES
BY ALABAMA COUNTIES 1915-1935

Date	Counties	Date	Counties	Date	Counties
1915-16	40	1922-23	24	1930-31	47
1916-17	4	1923-24	29	1931-32	26
1917-18	40	1924-25	13	1932-33	34
1918-19	9	1925-26	16	1933-34	46
1919-20	31	1926-27	19	1934-35	NA
1920-21	14	1929-30	36		

Source: Derived from State Department of Education Annual Reports, 1915-36.
Note: Alabama consists of 67 counties.

TABLE 3
CLAY COUNTY, ALABAMA OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS
SUMMER, 1926

SCHOOL	DISTRICT	TEACHERS	RACE
Ashland	1	1	Black
Lineville	3	1	Black
Bethel	12	1	White
Corinth	25	1	White
Mountain	25	2	White
Mount Zion	40	1	White
Pinkneyville	42	1	Black
New Prospect	75	1	White

Source: Clay County Board of Education. Minutes of the Clay County Board of Education. (Ashland,Alabama, 1926), p.122.

Reference Notes

1. Personal Correspondence. Wickliffe Rose to Wallace Buttrick. November 21, 1911. Rockefeller Archives. Box 720. Folder 7415. North Terrytown, New York.

2. Interview with Annie Maude Kennedy. Cragford, Alabama. December 17, 1981.

3. Interview with Grady Alford. Alexander City, Alabama. March 18, 1984.
   Interview with Grady and Edna Alford. Alexander City, Alabama. December 16, 1981.
   Interview with J.B. Fuller. Alexander City, Alabama. March 18, 1984.

4. Interview with Annie Maude Kennedy. Cragford, Alabama. December 17, 1981.

5. Interview with Luke Easter. September 4, 1984.

6. Interview with Sharon Woods. September 5, 1984.

7. Interview with Mary Alice Spain. Cookeville, Tennessee. January 11, 1985.

8. Personal correspondence in the possession of Jessie Lee. Opp, Alabama.

9. Personal correspondence in the possession of Sharon Woods. Nashville, Tennessee.

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Footnotes

1. Based upon 930 counties and representing an average county rate. Texas, Oklahoma, Maryland, and West Virginia were not included in the pool of southern counties.

2. Derived from the 1910 census utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

3. Derived from Annual Reports of the State Department of Education 1918-1936.